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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 000643

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STATE FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A, S/CRS, S/CT,
EUR/RPM, INL/CIVPOL
STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG,
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN
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SUBJECT: DIAG: STALLED AND SEARCHING FOR MOMENTUM

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald Neumann for reasons 1.4 (b) (d)

11. (C//REL/) Summary: President Karzai chaired a meeting of cabinet ministers and international community representatives February 7 to review progress made to date by the Disbandment of Illegally Armed Groups (DIAG) program and to approve formally the new DIAG Action Plan. While the revised action plan is designed to ensure greater political support at all levels and to move responsibility for DIAG operations into the line ministries, especially Ministry of Interior, the discussion never got around to the action plan. President Karzai opened and closed the meeting by noting that the program was important and should go forward, but that the environment was "delicate." While there was strong support for reinvigorating the program from some participants, notably the Japanese, and to a lesser extent from the EU, the discussion among the Afghan participants highlighted the many problems and challenges facing the program. Fairly pointed criticism of the program's lack of accomplishment and focus came both from Afghans and international partners. In the end, Karzai declared the program should go forward with greater speed, but that all should keep in mind the challenge of reconciling momentum with sensitivity to security concerns. While an incremental increase in DIAG activity could conceivably take place in some areas of the country, it is clear that process is stalled and no one knows how to invigorate it in the midst of the current level of fighting End Summary.

12. (C//REL/) Following an uninspiring presentation by First Vice President Khalili consisting mainly of a recitation of the details of the 28,700 weapons and explosives collected thus far under DIAG, Afghans and international partners alike struggled unsuccessfully to articulate a vision for a reinvigorated DIAG process that would reinforce the government's authority and make a real difference in the security situation on the ground.

International Community Concerns and Themes

13. (C//REL/) Views from the international community representatives fell broadly into two categories: those who wanted to restructure and refocus the DIAG program, learning lessons from past mistakes, and those who wanted to move forward quickly, arguing that DIAG was too important to dismantle and restructure. There was considerable overlap in these two views and even those with significant criticisms of the program acknowledged that long term security could not be achieved without DIAG. Several stressed the need for Presidential intervention to remove political obstacles. The Canadian Ambassador stressed the need for responsibility and ownership at the ministerial level, noting that his government had invested resources but didn't see results. The EU representative made an important distinction between quality and quantity, sensibly urging that DIAG focus on "weapons that threaten the population," rather than being strictly the numbers game that it has been in the past. The Ambassador of Japan, the "lead nation" for DIAG, on the other hand, declared that his country was satisfied with the progress to date and that Japanese people understand it is a difficult problem. (Note: when queried later whether this was truly the Japanese view, or merely a positive statement for tactical purposes, he reiterated this position. End note.) The Dutch charge said that while the momentum is stalled at the moment, the program needs to move forward.

KABUL 00000643 002 OF 002

The View from the Afghan Side

14. (C//REL/) Several of the Afghan participants, notably NDS chief Amarullah Saleh offered criticism as severe as anything from the international side. Claiming that the incentives were not working, Saleh cited a "lack of courage" in the security services to move against illegal armed groups when NDS provided information on them. Public confidence is weak because of the lack of loyalty and confidence in the security structures. The typically exuberant Attorney General Sabit suggested that the president sign a proclamation stating that after a date certain all persons possessing unlicensed weapons will be prosecuted, but his own colleagues dismissed the suggestion as impractical. The Minister of Interior unhelpfully suggested that DIAG was hampered by lack of infrastructure and could not move forward until the GOA had buildings from which to operate in all the districts, a comment which was privately derided by one of his colleagues after the meeting.

Not with a Bang but a Whimper...

15. (C//REL/) Perhaps drawing comfort from the one bright spot, the relatively successful strategic communications and public affairs component of the program, President Karzai noted that the concept had strong support from the public and said that he regularly receives requests from around the country to increase DIAG activity. He concluded by promising to raise DIAG from time to time in the Policy Action Group (PAG).

Comment

16. (C//REL/) Frustration with the slow pace of

progress on DIAG is nothing new. DIAG, as a concept, has strong Afghan and international support, however - reflecting political and security realities on the ground - implementation has not lived up to its promises. Many of the keys to successfully implementing DIAG in the long term, including strengthening leadership at the Ministry of Interior and expanding the reach of the police and security services across the country, are also keys to defeating the ongoing insurgency in the short to medium term. President Karzai, while offer symbolic support for DIAG, correctly appears more focused on strengthening his government and defeating the insurgency as his immediate priority. DIAG still has significant long term support. But many private discussions indicate that Ambassadors and Afghans alike share the perception that progress will require development of greater confidence that the GOA can protect those who disarm, and threaten those who do not.

NEUMANN